

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Patent Application

of

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for new and useful invention entitled:

CLUTCH ROLLER YOKE

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CLUTCH ROLLER YOKE**FIELD OF INVENTION**

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/431,260, filed December 6, 2002, the entire contents of which are herein incorporated by reference. The present invention relates to a driveline master clutch release yoke and more specifically to a driveline master clutch release yoke where a bearing support shaft is used to minimize bearing end loading.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] A heavy duty clutch release mechanism known in the art includes a clutch release sleeve, a clutch release bearing and a clutch release yoke. The clutch release lever has a lever engagement feature at a first end. The clutch release bearing engages a second end of the clutch release sleeve and has an inner race rotatably fixed to the second end of the clutch release sleeve. The clutch release yoke has roller assemblies disposed on each of two arms for engagement with an outer race of the clutch release bearing.

[0003] Unfortunately, the roller assemblies have several problems. Among other things the bearing elements associated with the roller assemblies have been subjected to the build up of contamination over time in combination with excessive end loading. Thus, the roller assemblies have failed sooner than would be optimally desired.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention provides a solution to a field problem when a roller assembly with bearing element is used on each fork end of a clutch release yoke. The release yoke includes at least two forks connected by a bridge section. The forks each have an inwardly extending bearing support shaft such that the bearing element supported thereon can engage a clutch release bearing. A retention flange is formed at one end of the bearing support shaft to hold the bearing element in the proper position and to protect the bearing from end loading. Another advantageous result is that the

improved retention flange also protects the roller bearing from harmful contamination. As a result premature aging of the roller assembly is minimized.

[0005] Another advantage is that a positioning snap ring becomes optional since the bearing element can be held between the retention flange and an inner surface of the fork, providing enhanced performance while simplifying assembly and reducing cost.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] FIG. 1 is a rearward facing end view of a clutch release yoke and clutch fork.

[0007] FIG. 2 is a side view of the release yoke and fork of FIG. 1 shown in the direction of arrows 2.

[0008] FIG 3 is a partial cross-sectional view of both the prior art roller assembly and the roller assembly of the present invention.

[0009] FIG. 4 is a sectional side view of the clutch assembly in a released position.

[0010] FIG. 5 is a sectional side view of the release bearing assembly.

[0011] FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of the bearing support shaft of the present invention.

[0012] FIG. 7 schematically illustrates a prior art clutch release system using a clutch release yoke having roller bearings on the end of the forks.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0013] Referring now to the drawings, the preferred illustrative embodiments of the present invention are shown in detail. Although the drawings represent some preferred embodiments of the present invention, the drawings are not necessarily to scale and certain features may be exaggerated to better illustrate and explain the present invention. Further, the embodiments set forth herein are not intended to be exhaustive or otherwise limit or restrict the invention to the precise forms and configurations shown in the drawings and disclosed in the following detailed description.

[0014] Figure 1 illustrates a clutch housing 10 pivotably supporting a clutch yoke 12. Clutch yoke 12 is used to selectively disengage clutch assembly 14, best shown in Figure 4, through displacement of a clutch release bearing assembly 15. A clutch linkage 16 disposed between a vehicle operator and the clutch yoke 12 includes an operating lever 17 disposed outside of clutch housing 10.

[0015] As illustrated in Figure 4, clutch assembly 14 includes a clutch cover 18 fixed to a flywheel 20. In turn, flywheel 20 is secured to an engine crankshaft (not shown) for rotation about an axis of rotation 22. A transmission input shaft 24, splined on a first end 25, extends from a transmission case (not shown) along axis 22. A pressure plate 28 is disposed between the clutch cover 18 and the flywheel 20 for axial movement therebetween, and it is rotatably fixed to the cover. A clutch driven disc 26 is rotatably fixed to the transmission input shaft 24 by way of the splined first end 25, and positioned between the flywheel 20 and the pressure plate 28 for axially slidable movement between the flywheel and pressure plate. Pressure plate 28 selectively compresses driven disc 26 against flywheel 20.

[0016] A clutch release sleeve 31 extends about axis 22 and is slidably and rotatably disposed on the transmission input shaft 24. It includes a first end 32 disposed between the pressure plate 28 and the clutch cover 18 and a second end 33 disposed on a side of the cover opposite the pressure plate 28. A plurality of clutch apply levers 30 are circumferentially distributed about axis 22, and extend radially from first end 32 of the release sleeve 31. Levers 30 include a radially inwardly disposed ends engaging first end 32 of the release sleeve 31. A radially outer end of

each lever 30 extends between release sleeve 31 and the pressure plate 28 and engages cover 18 directly, or indirectly by way of an adjusting mechanism 34.

[0017] As best illustrated in Figure 4 bearing release assembly 15 is disposed outside the clutch cover 18 and is connected to second end 33 of sleeve 31. As shown in Figure 5, an inner race 36 of release bearing assembly 15 is engaged with release sleeve 31 at second end 33 for axial movement therewith. A snap ring 90 helps retain inner race 36 on sleeve 32 and is received in a groove 92 circumferentially disposed about an outer surface of sleeve 31 such that the snap ring is contacts the inner race 36. An input shaft bushing 37 is press-fit in sleeve 31 in axial alignment with bearing assembly 15. An outer race 38, rotatably fixed to a bearing housing 39, is prevented from rotating relative to clutch housing 10. The outer race 38 is separated from the inner race by bearing members 35.

[0018] As shown in Figure 4, angle springs 40, which develop the clutch apply loads, are disposed between clutch cover 18 and the first end 32 of sleeve 31. Both the sleeve 31 and cover 18 have corresponding spring engaging features 42 and 44 respectively.

[0019] Clutch yoke 12, shown best in figures 1 through 3, straddles clutch release bearing assembly 15 and is secured to two coaxial fork shafts 46 for pivoting about pivot axis 48, defining a second axis of rotation at a right angle with respect to the axis of rotation 22. Preferably, pivot axis 48 is closer to the axis of rotation than clutch release bearing assembly outer race 38. An opposing end 94 of each fork shaft 46 is received within a corresponding opening 96 of clutch housing 10. One of the fork shafts 46 has an extended axial extent to such that its opposing end is fixed to an operating lever 17 such that movement of operating lever 17 will result in rotation of clutch yoke 12. Thus, fork shafts 46 each act as a clutch release shaft.

[0020] A cross member 50 of yoke 12 connects two opposed arms 52 adjacent bearing assembly 15. Each of the arms 52 have roller assemblies 54 positioned on an inboard side of an arm 52. Roller assembly 54 engages wear pads 56 on a forward side of bearing assembly 15.

[0021] Roller assembly 54 and release bearing assembly 15 are designed as a matched set so that the axial position of sleeve 31 varies as a function of the rotative position of lever 17 exactly as the position of sleeve 31 would vary with the position

of lever 17 in a non-roller system. This allows the roller yoke 12 to be installed in a system not explicitly designed for compatibility with a roller fork. The arms 52 of yoke 12 have been widened to make them more resistant to the torsional twisting force introduced by the cantilevered roller assembly 54.

[0022] The roller assembly 54 is shown in more detail on the right hand side of Figure 3, where for the purpose of illustration, the prior art roller discussed in the Background of the Invention is shown on the left hand side. Roller assembly 54 includes a bearing element 58 circumferentially disposed about an outer surface of a bearing support shaft 60. Bearing element 58 is not limited to one particular type of bearing design. For example, if a roller bearing is used, such roller bearings may include needle bearings, ball bearings, sleeve bearings and plastic bearings of various designs.

[0023] Bearing support shaft is typically made from steel and includes a first end 62 received within a corresponding opening 64 of one of the arms 52 and a second end 66 including a radially outwardly extending retention flange 68. Typically, the shaft 60 is compression fitted within opening 64 although any securement mechanism, including a threaded arrangement, may be used. Bearing element 58 is disposed between flange 68 and an inner surface 70 of arm 52 adjacent to opening 64.

[0024] Two embodiments of the roller assembly 54 are shown in Figures 6 and 7, respectively. In the embodiment of Figure 6, a roller assembly 54 includes a positioning snap ring 80 disposed between aligned grooves 82 and 84 of the support shaft 60 and bearing element 58.

[0025] A more preferred embodiment of roller assembly 54 is illustrated in Figure 7, where there is no positioning snap ring 80.

[0026] A roller assembly 54 in accordance with the present invention provides a number of advantages including the reduction of wear on the clutch release bearing assembly.

[0027] Further, the addition of a retention flange 68 provides a significant improvement over the roller assemblies known in the prior art. For example, as illustrated in Figure 7, it helps to hold bearing element 58 in a proper position independently of any snap ring 80. Moreover, it protects the bearing element from undesirable end loading. Further, retention flange 68 protects bearing element from

harmful contamination. In the illustrated embodiment, the radial extent of retention flange 68 is such that it substantially covers an end portion of bearing element 58 and most specifically covers and protects the portion of bearing element 58 in contact with shaft 60. In some preferred embodiments, however, it may be desirable to have the radial extent of flange 68 extend even further to provide additional protection to bearing element 58.

[0028] The invention operates in the following manner. Figure 4 shows the clutch in an engaged position. The position of clutch fork 12 and lever 17 is controlled by the position of release bearing assembly 15, which is in turn controlled by the travel limits of levers 31 against pressure plate 28, responsive to the force of springs 40. When the clutch is released by the operator through linkage 16, operating lever 17 rotates clutch fork 12, axially displacing release bearing assembly 15 rearwardly against the force of springs 40 to unload pressure plate 28. The unloading of pressure plate 28 unclamps driven disc 26, enabling relative rotation between driven disc 26 and pressure plate and flywheel 28 and 20. The second or pivot axis 48 is now forward of, or closer to the flywheel 20 than the bearing members. The pivot axis 48 remains closer to the rotative axis than the outer race 38.

[0029] As fork 12 is pivoted to the disengaged position, roller assemblies 54 move in a first direction along wear pads 56. As the clutch is reengaged by the operator, roller assemblies 54 move in a second direction, opposite the first direction, along wear pads 56. Roller assemblies 54 prevent the undesired wear of sleeve 37 by eliminating substantially all of the frictional drag of fork 12 against pads 56.

[0030] The present invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to the foregoing embodiments, which are merely illustrative of the best modes for carrying out the invention. It should be understood by those skilled in the art that various alternatives to the embodiments of the invention described herein may be employed in practicing the invention without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the following claims. It is intended that the following claims define the scope of the invention and that the method and apparatus within the scope of these claims and their equivalents be covered thereby. This description of the invention should be understood to include all novel and non-obvious combinations of elements described herein, and claims may be presented in this or a later

application to any novel and non-obvious combination of these elements. Moreover, the foregoing embodiments are illustrative, and no single feature or element is essential to all possible combinations that may be claimed in this or a later application.